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Custine's Eternal Russia

Robert B. Bathurst

commerce, colonies and shipping; and, the unimportance of industrial production as opposed to trade and shipping. He proceeds to challenge these assumptions and in doing so he places them in proper historical perspective. He shows they applied only to a particular set of circumstances.

Fortunately, Kennedy is a young historian of great promise, from whom much can be reasonably expected in the future. He has already written three other books, in addition to several articles. This book will certainly make his reputation, if it is not already established, as a competent historian as well as a good writer.

If Kennedy is young and still relatively unknown, Arthur Marder is a recognized naval historian *par excellence*. Where Kennedy concerns himself with the broad sweep of history, Marder has devoted his considerable talents to a definitive series of histories of the Royal Navy, commencing with his study of the Victorian navy and his monumental five volume, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*. However, in this more modest endeavor he has collected—to the delight of his readers—four essays published elsewhere, in addition to a thorough and reflective examination of the tragedy at Mers-el-Kebir, which he bases on access to relevant official documents, as well as interviews and correspondence. In so doing, he sheds new light on this unfortunate event.

When France concluded an armistice with Hitler in June 1940, the British were gravely concerned that the French Fleet would fall into German hands. Marder provides a detailed and suspenseful account of the events leading up to the actual British bombardment of the French Fleet at Mers-el-Kebir on 3 July 1940. He shows how tragic this whole series of events was for the officers and men who had recently been allies, for the commanders who were obliged to follow the directives of their respective superiors in London and Vichy, and even for Churchill himself who did not shrink from the painful decision because he saw the survival of Britain was at stake. Marder concludes that the real tragedy was "a case of right against right, for which reason there can never be a conclusive answer . . .."

While Kennedy's scope is broad, Marder's is deeper and more narrow. Where Kennedy reviews the span of centuries, Marder limits himself to a quarter of a century. Yet Kennedy in his discussion of the relationship of seapower to national development and Marder in his five studies of the Royal Navy demonstrate what the keenest observers and writers have known intuitively: Strategy is indeed comprehensive. It cannot be isolated from the real world. To be understood, it must be seen in relation to the whole course of events, whatever they may be.

B.M. SIMPSON III
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Kohler, Phyllis Penn. *Custine's Eternal Russia*. Miami: Center for Advanced International Studies, 1975. 218pp.

It is a sobering, perhaps shocking, experience for the normal American with all of his faith in progress and change and in the improvement of human nature to read Custine's account of his journey through Russia in 1839. What the book documents, page after page, in chilling detail is how little a culture does change in spite of world wars, revolution, and starvation, the destruction of the church and the imposition of a new theory of government and of life.

Reading this remarkable book also illuminates the degree to which we can remain ignorant of the real springs of action of a people. Try as he might and as countless successors after him, Custine could not penetrate the mystery of why the Russians act as they do, what is the key that unlocks this extraordinary culture which is at the same time

capable of great flights of humanitarian love and descents into the most barbaric and insane cruelty; which talks of the highest ideals of human freedom and liberation and enslaves vast masses in the most tyrannical system the world has ever known; which espouses the cause of the most advanced scientific studies and tries to hide the results in the darkest of closets. It is likely that we know more about the smallest Indian tribe in the remotest part of America than we do about the springs of action of the Russian culture.

Custine's journey, in many respects, mirrored what has become the basic pattern for the emotional reactions of countless travelers to Russia right up to the present day. Nearly everyone goes to Moscow assuming that things cannot be as bad as they are described; that once the Russians learn how nice we are, they will stop being suspicious; and that, in any case, life is getting better with greater contact with the West. Even a superficial reading of Custine shows how trite that attitude is. From the very first pages to the last, one can excerpt long passages which modern travelers would think, if they did not know the origin, were written yesterday. For instance, in the Chapter "I Laugh Off the Warning of an Innkeeper," travelers who leave Russia are described as having a "gay, free, happy air," and those returning "have long, gloomy, tormented faces." Anyone who has traveled to Russia several times has noted the same thing. Speaking of a guided tour through Petersburg, we read with astonishment Custine's observation that a tour through the capital is unlike a tour through the capitals of the civilized world, because under the supervision of the guide, "everything is constrained in a state governed with a logic as tightly drawn as that directing Russian policy." As Custine explained it, "Everyone here, you see, thinks about what no one says." One could describe Intourist or its guides no better with "the astonishment, the terror, the defiance, the affected innocence, the feigned ignorance" which accompanies the answers to our questions.

What does one make of the fact that nearly a century and a half ago a traveler through Russia was followed, spied upon, controlled, his mail was censored or confiscated and his guide was part of the official police network? How does one deal with the facts that even then disasters were not reported, that people who were arrested simply disappeared and no one dared tell the truth? It is not enough to say that nothing has changed. The mind cannot accept so simplistic a statement. Certainly much has changed, but apparently not the way people feel or the way institutions function. Obviously, reading such a book is an intellectual challenge, especially for Americans who tend to think that people change when they find out a better way to do things. After reading Custine, one returns to the history books with the question, "What was life like in old Russia?" The answer is discouraging. As Custine observed, the Russian people must have been the most unhappy of any nation and many modern travelers come away with the same conclusion today. But more to the point, one must wonder what a revolution is for? Custine's descriptions make it clear that the old czarist institutions have been reestablished with new names.

Custine, who went to Russia to gather material to support arguments against republican governments, was so shocked that he was turned into a democrat. He also developed a fear for the future of Europe, for he discovered that the Russian Empire was a militarized society, dominated by the irrational emotions of respect for European science and contempt for its bumbling freedoms and materialistic ethos (which implies, among other things, a respect for individual wants.) His fear of the combination of oriental

despotism (it really has turned out not to be oriental at all but Western in origin where extreme idealism—whether religious or political—seems to breed unmitigated cruelty) with Western scientific knowledge has been realized in the Soviet Union.

A popular bit of wisdom, frequently repeated in America, is that one should learn the lessons of history. Reading Custine, one wonders if that is ever taken seriously, for how many thousands of times has his journey been repeated and will be repeated before its significance will replace the popular notions about that strange land? Perhaps it is not true that we learn from history; we can only learn by our mistakes or through experience. Certainly about the present, Custine could say, "I told you so!"

Phyllis Kohler's translation is extremely readable. We must all be grateful to her for making this important work available in English. The new edition (which does not appear to differ from the old one under the title, *Journey for Our Time*) is enriched with an introduction by Foy Kohler, formerly the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and now one of our oldest and most venerated Russian hands. His introduction emphasizes the importance of this book for those who are interested in strategic and military questions.

For an exciting intellectual experience, after reading Custine, one should reread Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which was written at about the same time by another extraordinary Frenchman who also was trying to find arguments against the democratic form of government. The two works by two such penetrating minds make convincing evidence that there are constants in human behavior that appear and reappear through all manner of circumstances. With Custine, one can contemplate the Russians and then through Tocqueville the Americans. Then one can contemplate the Americans trying to understand the Russians and in the end, you come up with a reaffirmation of the old French saying, "plus ca change, plus ca la meme chose"—the more things change, the more it is the same old thing.

ROBERT B. BATHURST
Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
U.S. Coast Guard Academy

Korb, Lawrence J. *The Joint Chiefs of Staff—The First Twenty-five Years.* Bloomington: University of Indiana Press. 210pp.

Mr. Korb's book—the first to attempt a history and a critique of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—their accomplishments and their failures—is, to this reviewer, bivalent. It is ambitious, instructive and frustrating, occasionally perceptive and knowledgeable, but also simplistic and superficial, and at times, woefully wrong.

The book's strengths are the author's clear descriptions of the organization and methodology of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their first quarter century and an examination of their professional background. Mr. Korb also contributes a good account, in a chapter entitled "The Battle of the Potomac" of some of the politics of the defense budget and he stresses the synonymous relationship between dollars and military policy. The book's weaknesses stem from the inadequacy of the author's sources, all of them, except for interviews, public, and some of them unreliable as a basis for history; from compression and abbreviation (which lead to sweeping generalizations and inadequate explanation), and to the author's attempts to play global Monday-morning quarterback.

What Mr. Korb has really attempted in the short space of 210 pages (including notes and index) is nothing less gargantuan than a kind of bird's eye survey of the nation's security policies in the last 25 years. The focus is the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but as the author